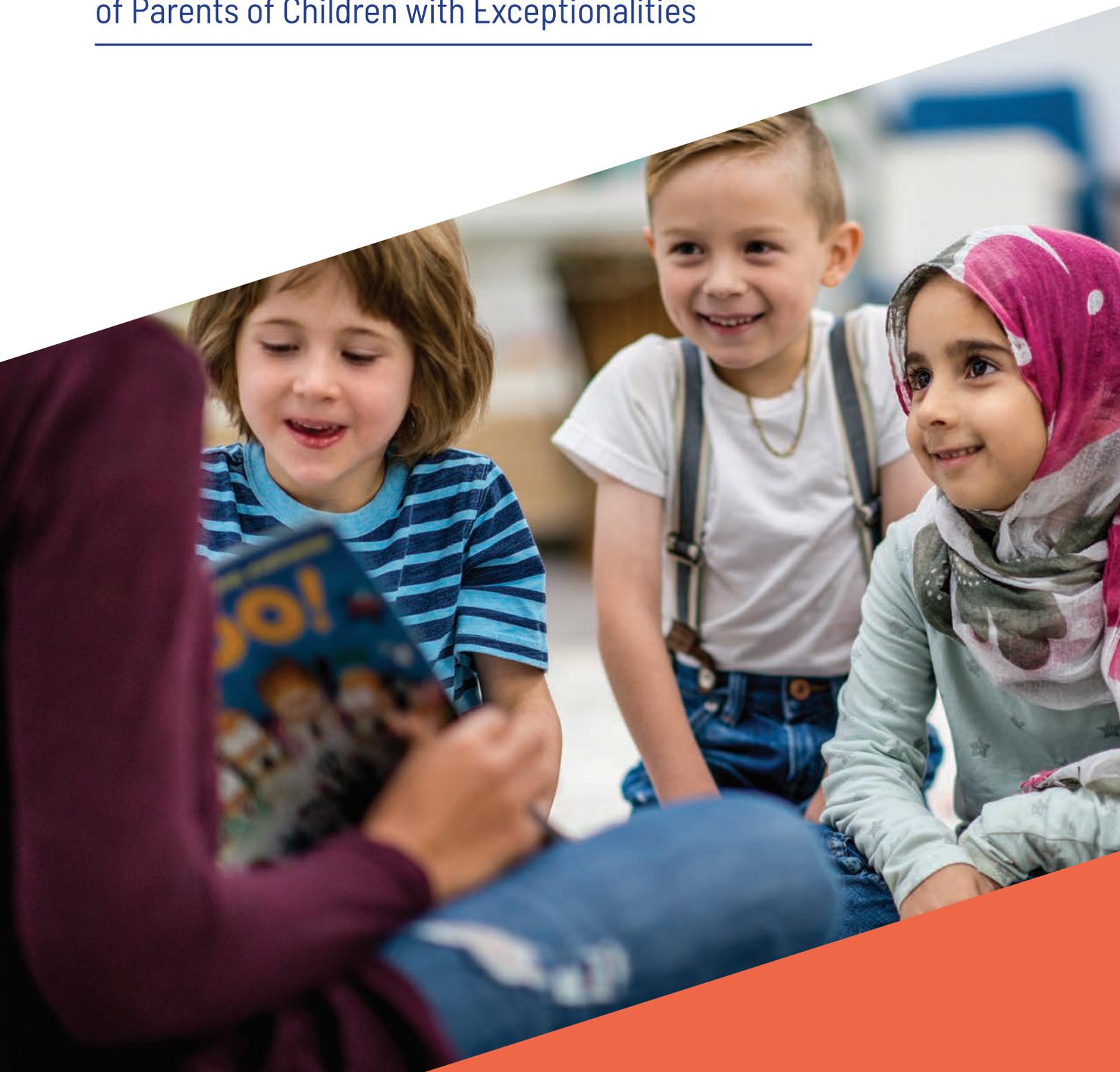


Parent and Caregiver Voices

Experiences and Perspectives
of Parents of Children with Exceptionalities



Research Questions

- What are the experiences of parents of children with exceptionalities in Saskatchewan schools and the community?
- How do parents in Saskatchewan advocate for services and inclusive education for their child?
- According to parents, what are the best practices for inclusion? How can educators in Saskatchewan provide for students with exceptionalities in their classrooms?

The purpose of the study was to listen to the voices of parents of children with exceptionalities as they shared their experiences around advocating for their children in the education system.

Over a period of four months, 17 people (15 mothers, two fathers) were interviewed using a semi-structured interview format. All participants were self-referred.



Dawn: "I think it's important that we treat people with disabilities like everyone else . . . We have expectations of them, accommodate for them and learn more about each other too. That learning about each other and realizing that there's not just one way of doing something is good for everybody . . . I think the benefit of inclusive classrooms is hopefully the foreshadowing of an inclusive world."



Misha: "Communication with parents and caregivers is the most important thing that you can do for a child. Communication with parents is everything, and if it can't be positive communication, then how can there be any type of positive change."

Implications for Educators

- ▶ High level of intensity of parenting – work closely with parents, be supportive, try to ease their world a bit.
- ▶ Navigating systems – help to connect them to systems.
- ▶ Inclusion – make every effort to include all children and talk about diversity, use DI and UDL and Accommodate, work with your student services teacher, take risks – it's ok if you are a bit clumsy at first, they are still learning, be an advocate for inclusion.
- ▶ Communication between home and school – listen, meet with them often, communicate often, work with them to be agents of change.
- ▶ Socialization/social-emotional well-being – use strategies and approaches that help children build friendships and develop positive social-emotional skills.
- ▶ Believing in potential/strengths-based approach – be a believer, do not place limits on children, know what your students are capable of and use the zone of proximal development.
- ▶ Marginalization – help children build friendships and friendship skills, help them make connections, help families make connections to agencies and supports.
- ▶ Systems – write letters and emails, speak up any way you can.
- ▶ Accolades and appreciation – remember you are appreciated!



Lynn: “I really hope you guys (school employees) get support because quite honestly, it’s gonna be so much stress on teachers and EAs . . . like being a teacher, I can’t believe how much more complicated being a teacher is than when I was young . . . you put so much time into my kid . . . it just floors me. You know, as a parent, I’m so thankful for that.”



Ann: “Set the bar high. Push him. Because he will grow. And the teachers who have done that . . . actually, even the teachers who didn’t do that, he still grew . . . Even if it wasn’t 100%, they (his teachers) still showed up, and everyone has contributed to his growth. Whether it was something they did or something they didn’t do, it still contributed to his growth.”



Dianne: "I felt, and still feel, that the biggest challenge is navigating a system I know nothing about. Trying to keep all of the information organized in my head and on paper, going to meetings and feeling very intimidated by a lot of educated professionals who greatly outnumber us, being heard and understood by all those professionals."



Elsa: "Over the years, she's been surrounded by a lot of great people, and we've been so blessed for that. . . all those meetings and stuff . . . we know how much effort goes into those things."



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